

In the fall of 2002, when Congress debated a resolution on the use of U.S. Armed Forces against Iraq, I offered an alternative war resolution - one with some definitive conditions. My resolution required the President to provide Congress with a comprehensive plan for the long term cultural, economic, and political stabilization in a free Iraq before committing U.S. Armed Forces to a war with Iraq.

When I presented my resolution, I said, "The young men and women of our armed forces are already fighting a war on terrorism. Before we expand their role, and send them even deeper into harm's way, I want assurances that we have a plan for maintaining stability in the region once we declare victory." The bill ultimately approved by Congress authorizing the President to use our armed forces against the threat posed by Iraq did not include the preconditions I introduced. I can only imagine what Iraq and the Middle East would look like today if Congress had passed my resolution instead.

When I voted against using troops in Iraq more than four years, I believed then - and still believe today - that this was not a war of necessity, but rather a war of choice and convenience. As we have learned since that vote, my concerns were indeed justified.

The Bush administration lied about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and skewed our intelligence to mislead the international community, members of the House, and the American public. Theirs was a not a path to victory. It was a path of deceit.

President Bush wrongfully rushed our nation into war not considering that military action is rarely, if ever, in a nation's best interest. The decision to send our troops into battle should always be a last resort.

Unfortunately for our great country, this war has come at great expense. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, more than 4,300 American soldiers have died, and more than 31,300 Americans have been wounded. Furthermore, Congress has already committed more than \$656.1 billion to this effort and will likely be asked to appropriate tens of billions of dollars more.

Additionally, I was extremely disheartened by the unconscionable treatment of Iraqi prisoners by United States soldiers. I condemn these horrible acts that were a shocking reminder of the brutal realities of war. Congress must continue to harshly and steadfastly deal with these atrocities and hold responsible all who have contributed to the abuses.

I have received numerous letters from family members of deployed active and reserve troops. They keep asking me a question that I'm unable to answer: 'How much longer are our troops going to be deployed?' Today, I am hopeful to provide Congress with an exit strategy for Iraq along with a comprehensive plan for the cultural, economic and political stabilization in that country.

The Bush administration failed to achieve the cultural, economic and political goals they had set for the beleaguered nation. President Bush was not forthcoming about how long our troops will remain in Iraq or how much the United States' occupation will cost in its entirety. That is why I voted against the final passage of the compromised Iraq supplemental funding legislation in May 2007. This compromise with the President only gave him what he wanted, funding without the accountability of a timeline for redeploying our troops. While I am dedicated to providing necessary funding to protect our troops, I am not convinced that this legislation will not result in more unnecessary deaths.

In the 111th Congress, I have reintroduced H.R. 578, the *Iraqi Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Security Act of 2009*

. My legislation addresses this crisis and the potential security break-down resulting from the mass influx of Iraq refugees into neighboring countries and the growing internally displaced population in Iraq, and also facilitates the resettlement of Iraqis at risk. There are more than 4.7 million Iraqis who are currently displaced within their own country and in neighboring states such as Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Egypt and Lebanon. The United States must be a leader in encouraging the international community to focus on this humanitarian crisis, recognize it for the potential security threat it poses, and take steps to alleviate the suffering of Iraqi refugees.

There are still many unanswered questions concerning Iraq's future. We have a lot of work to do and I am looking forward to working with my colleagues in Congress and with President Obama towards a detailed and comprehensive plan for what we can expect in the coming months and years. At the very least, we owe this to U.S. troops, their families, the American taxpayers, and our allies.